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Reagan plans 'aggressive' approach to intelligence

By BETSY STONE
Guardian Bureau

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The new administration plans major changes in the organization and operation of the nation's intelligence community, a preliminary report issued last week by President-elect Ronald Reagan's CIA transition team indicates.

As noted by the team's head, J. William Middendorf 2, the report favors a more "aggressive" approach to intelligence.

And while last week's document is one of several clues to what's in store for the CIA, a proposed charter for the FBI drafted by close Reagan adviser Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.) last spring gives a good indication of the new administration's ideas for domestic intelligence.

These and other proposals show the Republicans' interest in stepping up secrecy and clandestinity in the intelligence community. They also reflect an apparent lack of concern for checks on abuse of power by the FBI and the CIA.

The transition team's report emphasizes three major areas of concern. First, organizationally, the report recommends the establishment of competing centers of intelligence analysis. Under this system, other government intelligence bureaus such as the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency would be asked to criticize and challenge CIA analyses.

CENTRAL RECORDS SYSTEM

A second proposal suggests the creation of a central records system that could be used jointly by the CIA and domestic agencies such as the FBI. The central file would facilitate coordination of counterintelligence activities to combat what the report calls the "growing threat of Soviet espionage and international terrorism."

Similar proposals have been made in the past and strenuously opposed by civil liberties groups. Such a records keeping system, critics charge, is an excuse to monitor political activities under the guise of investigating "subversion."

Finally, the report calls for expanding the CIA's covert action budget and placing more emphasis on such options.

Similar measures have recently been

proposed by other Reagan advisers as well. Most significant, all the suggestions were part of a recent report by the right-wing Heritage Foundation. According to Heritage president Edwin Feulner, the Reagan team will be relying "heavily" on the Heritage report. In addition, a subcommittee of the Republican National Committee (RNC) headed by Reagan's chief foreign policy adviser Richard Allen issued a report, "Intelligence and the Role of the Intelligence Community." Its proposals are similar to the transition team's report.

NEW CLANDESTINE AGENCY

The reports of the Heritage Foundation and the RNC's subcommittee go further than the transition team however. Both insist that a clandestine agency to wage covert operations must be separated from the analytical branch of the CIA. "This agency, as such, would be wholly clandestine; every agency of the U.S. government would be required to furnish the clandestine services with full credentials, working assignments abroad for purposes of 'cover' and full cooperation," reported the group.

Something that can definitely be expected under the Republican administration is an increase in secrecy, with Reagan's advisers and key Senate leaders strongly advocating exempting the intelligence agencies from the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, these forces wish to make all disclosure of the names of U.S. intelligence operatives abroad a crime.

As for other secrets, many fear that a new congressional oversight law signed by President Jimmy Carter in October leaves the reporting requirements between the CIA and Congress so ambiguous that effective oversight will be impossible.

Critics of the intelligence agencies are alarmed by what they see as a general disinterest in Congress toward CIA oversight.

Also of concern to those working on intelligence reform is a charter for the FBI which was drafted last spring by Republican senators, including Laxalt, who describes himself as Reagan's "ears and eyes." The proposed charter advocates increased spying on political activists. It would:

- mandate the FBI to gather intelligence

on any public demonstration with the potential for violence;

- shield agents from prosecution for breaking the law if they were following orders;

- empower the FBI to investigate anyone who threatens to violate the law, whether or not the facts indicated that a crime is about to happen and even if the crime is nonviolent civil disobedience. "Our charter," admits Laxalt aide Alfred Regnery, "would theoretically leave the way open for those FBI abuses uncovered in the past. But we don't think those things are likely to happen again."

Not everyone agrees. Jerry Berman, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union has called the proposal "an open-season license to investigate lawful political activity, compile dossiers on citizens, invade privacy through the use of intrusive investigatory techniques, and in effect, institutionalize a return to the Hoover era."